

# Misconceptions About Distance Learning

## **Misconception #1: Interactive television will replace teachers.**

Interactive video instruction will not replace teachers. It provides an additional opportunity for K-12 students in rural locales who, without it, would not be able to take certain—usually specialized—courses. Interactive video instruction also serves adult students who otherwise would have to travel long distances to take classes. If the degree of travel is NOT a factor, however, both students and instructors prefer traditional face-to-face instruction. Learners have indicated a preference for conventional instruction over interactive video instruction; they wanted personal contact with instructors. Yet both students and faculty have rated distance education courses as similar in quality to courses taught in the traditional manner and worth the trade-off in travel time. They also indicated their willingness and ability to adapt to the delivery system.

## **Misconception #2: Classes will disseminate to many sites and have large numbers of students.**

There is a limit (technologically and pedagogically) to the number of sites that a (two-way) distance learning system can serve. Typically, within EDNET classes there are technical limitations to the number of sites and the facilities at each school. Even the number of chairs in the receiving classroom is carefully controlled so that the instructor, who monitors from the originating site, can see students easily. There is a desired level of interaction that is appropriate and necessary in distance learning classrooms. It is necessary to establish a level of quality similar to that in a traditional classroom. In general, as the number of sites increases, the total number of participants should decrease.

## **Misconception #3: Interactive video instruction is dramatically different from traditional teaching.**

Teaching via interactive television is not dramatically different from traditional face-to-face instruction. It can serve as a catalyst for innovation and improvement in total instructional proficiency. The adaptations made in enhancing and adapting a traditional class to interactive video instruction will be minimal, but with proper training, it can be very effective. The guidelines for interactive video instruction are the same as those for conventional classrooms. Instructors need to plan learning activities that facilitate active student engagement with concepts presented.

## **Misconception #4: Interactive video instruction requires a lot of additional preparation time.**

Initially, there will be more time spent in preparation than presentation; instructors will not need to spend a lot of supplemental time teaching via interactive video instruction. Effective distance learning instructors learn to see distance learning as a TEAMWORK opportunity for themselves, administrators, and facilitators as well as their students. Using others to assist with delivering of mail, faxing of papers, and monitoring of exams and tests will ease the day-to-day teaching planning time. Preparing a classroom syllabus has been very effective (see EDNET Users Manual 7-39 to 7-42). A well-organized, prepared, enthused distance learning teacher will do well on EDNET; a poorly prepared, unmotivated teacher will have difficulty on EDNET as in any other class!

## **Misconception #5: Students do not learn as well by means of interactive video instruction.**

This is unproven. Some scholars indicate that students in distance learning situations become more independent learners, taking a more aggressive role in communicating their needs and seeking feedback. A majority of investigation findings indicate that instructors address course content faster in televised instruction than they do in the conventional classroom. This may provide instructors more class time to involve students in interactive learning experiences and could contribute to better concept attainment in the distance learners. The idea that students do not learn as well via interactive television is unsubstantiated. It is possible that learners involved in two-way video instruction learn better and become more self-directed than those in conventional face-to-face classroom situations.

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## **Misconception #6: Interactive television will rescue failing schools.**

Interactive video instruction will not be advantageous for teacher education or schools as long as learners and their instructors still prefer face-to-face traditional instruction. Installation, usage, and maintenance costs of video instruction technology are expensive. In addition, instructors and students of distance learning must expect occasional technical problems. Links between sites sometimes do not maintain, and there are sporadic audio and video difficulties. Such challenges may not be rooted in the home system; they could be located at any number of points along the network. EDNET has an effective staff of engineers, both locally and throughout the state, working in conjunction with local phone companies to maintain the integrity of the system.

## **Misconception #7: Some courses cannot be taught on interactive television.**

Any course that can be taught in a traditional classroom can be taught via interactive video instruction. In some courses, there is a possibility that students could get hurt; e.g., some laboratory and industrial arts courses. Modifications can be made, however, so that even these courses can be offered successfully via interactive video. One such adaptation is the use of teaching assistants; another is a limit on the number of students and locations involved. A combination approach in which laboratories are held separately from interactive video instruction is also used.

## **Misconception #8: Interactive video will save money.**

Interactive video networks are expensive. Initial connection costs for typical EDNET receiving sites are approximately \$30,000. Originating (teaching) sites can be twice that amount. Additionally, recurring costs include monthly fees to the long distance carriers, line usage charges, and maintenance charges. Financial responsibility for the facilitators at each site belongs to the school district. College (concurrent enrollment) courses presented to high schools also carry tuition and fees that are collected from school districts, the legislature, or the State Office of Education.

Interactive video systems facilitate educational opportunities for students who would not otherwise be able to take classes. Their expense must be considered in light of the benefits they provide for students and for the educational institutions. In Utah over the past several years, there have been nearly 5,000 students who have taken EDNET distance learning classes for college credit and who have never set foot on the college campus. Nontraditional, older students who live in geographically isolated areas are now taking part in degree programs they can complete in their home areas, usually rural communities. Without access to distance learning technology, potential students lack the educational opportunities and, therefore, fewer enroll. Interactive video networks do not save us money. These networks and technologies are expensive, but that cost must be weighed against the benefits provided to students and educational institutions.

## **Misconception #9: All teachers can teach well on interactive video.**

It is unfortunate but true that even some instructors who work in traditional face-to-face classrooms are not successful. When more teachers limit their use of lecture-passive models and implement more teaching techniques that actively engage students with the concepts they are teaching, then more will be able to teach well in both interactive video and conventional teaching.

Interactive video is dramatically different from traditional teaching. Interactive video is similar to conventional teaching even though the technology introduces a different set of factors. Interactive video instructors as well as those in regular classroom situations have similar obligations to students. Some are better at meeting those responsibilities than others, regardless of teaching contexts.

## **Misconception #10: All students will succeed in an interactive video class.**

There are some students who are not successful in conventional face-to-face classes, and there are those who fail interactive video classes. Interactive video instruction is not dramatically different from traditional teaching. Students who do best in an interactive video class appear to be less dependent on the instructor; they have a sense of responsibility, motivation, and discipline similar to those who do well in conventional classrooms. We, as distance learning teachers, appear to worry a lot about students at our remote sites not being able to do as well as those with whom we work in conventional classrooms. Perhaps there is an identifiable group of students, for instance, who would perform a little better with close personal instructor contact. To say that all students in any class will be successful, however, is an ideal goal but a misrepresentation of reality.